

OKALYI HOUSE

Address	66 Old Eltham Road, Lower Plenty
Significance	Local
Construction Date	1968-70
Period	Late 20 th century
Date Inspected	January 2021



Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

Okalyi House at 66 Old Eltham Road, Lower Plenty is significant. It was designed by the architect Charles Duncan for husband-and-wife Zoltan and Elizabeth Jane Okalyi and built between 1968 and 1970.

The significant elements are its U-shaped form, gabled roof, deep eaves, timber-lined soffit, central chimney, stained timber beams and rafters, variegated dark-brown brick walls, piers, obtuse-angled brick detailing, timber-framed and floor-to-ceiling windows, incorporated double carport, and slate-clad courtyard. The 'bushland' character of the garden, including the raised earth bank immediately east of the house, complements the overall aesthetic of *Okalyi House*.

Some original elements to the interior are also significant, specifically the pine-lined ceilings (raked and concealed), exposed brick walls, floors paved in slate, and brick fireplace,

Later addition elements are not significant.

How is it Significant?

Okalyi House is of historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Banyule.

Why is it Significant?

Okalyi House is of historical significance as an accomplished example of the neo-Wrightian organic design mode by the architect Charles Duncan. This approach evolved as a striking variant of Melbourne's modern movement, reflecting an aspiration among a

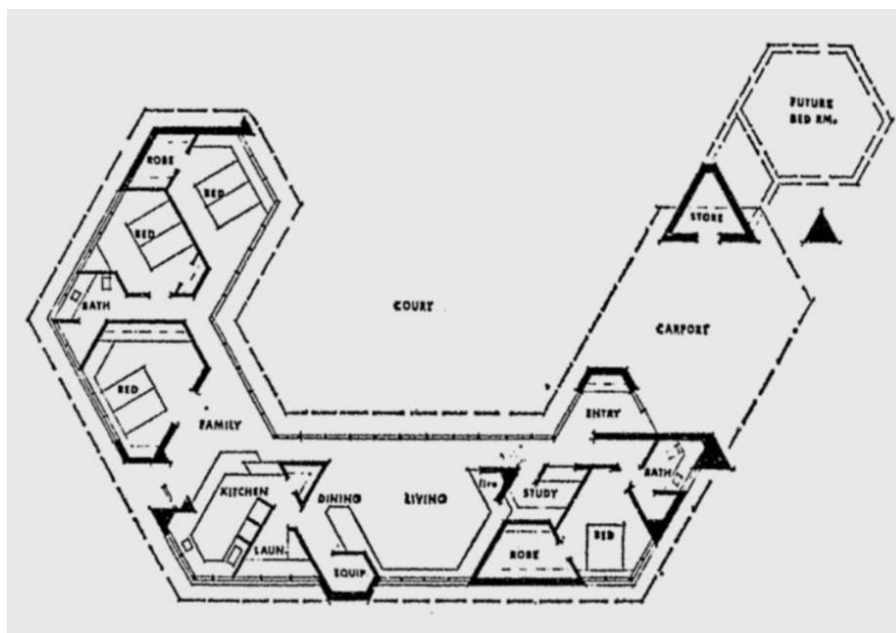
relatively small group of architects to develop a regionalised, more humanist version of international modernism rooted in local landscapes and conditions. While Duncan was celebrated in his heyday, his role in advancing and popularising a convincing regional idiom in Melbourne is now less generally recognised. *Okalyi House*, which was awarded *The Age*/RAIA Citation (no 34) in 1972, provides a valuable opportunity for examining a largely intact and idiosyncratic example of Duncan's work. More broadly, the residence – with its focus on functional and flowing spaces, natural light, and enhanced indoor/outdoor relationships – reflects some of the major lifestyle shifts that defined its period. Noted landscape designer, Gordon Ford, was responsible for the original garden, and a 'bush style' character remains evident. (Criterion A)

Okalyi House is of aesthetic significance as a largely intact and outstanding instance of organic/regional modernism in Melbourne. Its horizontality and remarkable modular U-shaped form demonstrate the command exercised by its architect, Charles Duncan, over Wrightian principles and ability to reference 'natural' arrangements in built form and detail. The emphatic expression of load and support conveyed to the street by the cavernous carport is striking. Less noticeable, due to orientation and landscaping, is the deft contrast achieved between robustly massed and textured brick piers/return walls and expansive sections of full height windows. The ground-hugging quality of the dwelling, supported by its low gabled roof and extended eaves, and considered relationship with its landform, illustrates Duncan's desire to craft complete designs that sensitively anchored house to site – the building surfacing from the landscape rather than imposed on it. Reinforcing these aspects of the place, are seamless transitions between inside and outdoor living spaces, especially the slate-paved courtyard, and its limited 'earthy' material palette. (Criterion E)

Description

The single-storey *Okalyi House* is situated lengthwise on a large allotment at a moderate set back from the south side of Old Eltham Road. It is bordered to the west and east by residential properties and, to the rear, by the Heidelberg Golf Course. The residence is relatively concealed, with the majority of the building screened by trees and the undulating contours of the land or purposefully sited away from the street. This interest in privacy over public display was a key marker of many progressive architect-formulated houses from the early 1960s.

The footprint and form of *Okalyi House* are distinctive and modular, comprised of two hexagonal (front and centre) and octagonal (rear) wings that interlink to create a U-shape around a central courtyard. The interior has a triangular layout, with no right angles included within the floorplan.¹ Duncan explained these radical departures from the conventional as dictated by the slope of the property to the south. It also reveals his interest in organic architectural principles, particularly the aim of harmonising structure and site and orientating living spaces to take advantage of the solar cycle. Manifest also is the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright's *Hanna-Honeycomb House* (1937), although shorn of its stylistic excesses.²



Original floor plan, note extensive 'window walls' indicated by parallel lines. The 'future bedroom' that was proposed to join the north of the carport was never constructed (Source: Barker, "The Age" — RAIA Citation Award No. 34', *Age*, 15 May 1972, p11)

¹ John Barker, 'A new angle on planning', *Age*, 15 May 1972, p11

² Also noted by Philip J Goad, *The modern house in Melbourne, 1945-1975*, PhD thesis, Faculty of Architecture Building & Planning, University of Melbourne, 1992, Chapter 6, p53. The form of *Okalyi House* is elsewhere referred to elsewhere as a 'repeating polygonal module'. (Heritage Alliance, *Survey of Post-War Built Heritage in Victoria*, Stage 1, vol 2, October 2008, p183, part F)

Okalyi House has a very low-pitched gable roof, now clad in later addition metal sheeting, with deep eaves and a timber-lined soffit.³ There is a squat and geometric brick chimney to the roof of the middle wing. Skylights to the rear wing may be later additions, although Duncan was known to employ them.

An integrated double carport defines the front wing and streetscape presentation of *Okalyi House*. It is surmounted by three hefty laminated and darkly stained pine beams, which puncture or sit atop the same number of differently sized triangular piers. The inner pier, adjacent to the house's main entrance (obscured from the street), pierces the roofline. The incorporation of the entry within the carport was increasingly favoured over the 1960s, expressing a direct connection between the house and the car, a 'drive-in domesticity'.⁴ The carport's floor is paved in brick. Sightlines through the carport to the internal courtyard are obscured by a solid timber fence, which is possibly non-original. Roof beams also project at the rear of the dwelling.



Carport with timber beams prominent

During construction, a roughly metre deep 'cut' was made for the dwelling into the incline. Excess soil was then arranged around the eastern side of the house, forming a 'high' side. This cut and fill activity was undertaken to accentuate the image of the house burrowing/nestling within the contours of the site. Such a relationship between the dwelling and landform remains.

The dwelling is of cavity wall construction employing variegated dark-brown stock bricks set in a stretcher bond with light brown tinted mortar. Such materials were low-maintenance and 'earthy' in aesthetic, which assists in further melding the house with the grounds. Brickwork throughout is confined to short lengths of return walls and piers of varying sizes. For the most part, banks of timber-framed floor-to-ceiling 'window walls' enclose *Okalyi House*. While predominantly not visible from the street, these elements – fundamental for the introduction of light into the interior and the creation of indoor/outdoor spatial continuity – are likely to remain.

The corners of the front piers disappaly obtuse-angled brickwork, a Wrightian motif intended to invoke the appearance of honeycomb (initially experimented with at the *Hanna-Honeycomb House*). This decorative treatment is continued to some other wall corners, both external and internal.

³ Originally, Monier Besser brand grey-coloured cement tiles in a 'slate pattern'. (Barker, 'A new angle on planning, p11)

⁴ Geoffrey London, Philip Goad and Conrad Hamann, *An Unfinished Experiment in Living: Australian Houses 1950-65*, UWAP Publishing, 2017, p17



Rear wing (south), during or soon after construction
(Source: Peter Wille, SLV, H91.244/1738)

The sizable courtyard is open to the west, where it melds with the bush garden, and surfaced in recycled slate paving (possibly reused roofing slates). It contains a small in-ground pool, a future addition envisioned by Duncan.⁵

As discussed, *Okalyi House*'s original floor was triangular, presenting as a series of carefully delineated, free-flowing spaces. The interior was designed in a pared-down fashion with pine-lined raked and concealed ceilings (recessed lights), a lighted coloured ('orange-brown') brick and slate paved floors. The central living room has a small but cave-like fireplace.



Living room, facing north – note obtuse brick-detailing above the fireplace
(Source: Peter Wille, SLV, H91.244/173)

⁵ Barker, 'A new angle on planning', p11

The house is set within a 'bush style' garden devised by Gordon Ford. The essence of his approach remains interpretable in the informal native/indigenous landscaping of the whole site, which presents from the street as genuine bushland. The relaxed placement of boulders on the on the east side of the gravelled driveway may be original and certainly reflects Ford's desired aesthetic. The retention of the earth bank at the front of the site, with a swale drain acting as public gutter, underlies the natural setting of *Okalyi House* (and is repeated elsewhere in Old Eltham Road). Fencing is not evident to the front and side of the subject place.



Views to *Okalyi House* filtered through its 'bush style' garden

Okalyi House is classifiable as an example of what architectural historian Philip Goad describes as the 'Wrightian survival'.⁶ A vein of postwar modernism that turned away from the perceived anonymity of the International Style to draw from the American master Frank Lloyd Wright's ideas of 'Organic Architecture'. These complex principles were typically translated as an intimate response to site, low-slung and vaguely biomorphic forms, humble materials, and an embrace of 'primitive' – albeit readily modern – notions of space and shelter (the cave). From the 1970s, many aspects of the neo-Wrightian approach pioneered by architects entered the vernacular of mainstream builders.⁷

Alongside some Melbourne architects' fascination with Wright and his body of work – generally reconceived to suit local conditions (reduced scale, detail and cost, and climate specifics) – were other important interests, such as a re-evaluation of Walter Burley and Marion Mahony Griffin and the humanism of Alvar Aalto. Less articulated but deeply rooted were the influences of traditional eastern design and the Arts & Crafts movement. The organic design mode, gathering pace over the 1950s, illustrated a more profound engagement of modernist architects with the local landscape and search for an authentic regional built expression.⁸ In contemporary circles, organic/regional versus rational/international modernism proved the central architectural dichotomy. Duncan's creative practice within the domain of the former is notable.

The organic/regional design mode, alongside the other variants of the modern movement, should also be recognised as indicative of major shifts in daily life for the wider population, particularly from the mid-1950s, driven by rising prosperity, technological advances and changing societal attitudes. The enthrallment of many avant-garde architects with domestic design both reflected and reinforced such transformations, encouraging lifestyles revolving around intensifying consumerism, increased car ownership and more relaxed outdoor-orientated mindsets. 'Good-life Modernism' for those who could attain it.⁹

⁶ Goad, *The modern house in Melbourne, 1945-1975*, Chapter 6, pp31-32

⁷ Philip Goad, 'The Australian House in the 1960s', in Paula Whitman, Tracey Avery and Peta Dennis, eds, *Cool: The 1960s Brisbane House*, School of Design and Built Environment, QUT, 2004, p8

⁸ Goad, 'Regionalism', in Goad and Julie Willis, eds, *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p589

⁹ Mark Jarzombek, "'Good-Life Modernism' And Beyond: The American House in the 1950s and 1960s: A Commentary", *The Cornell Journal of Architecture*, vol 4, 1990, pp77-93

History

Context

The City of Banyule covers the unceded Country of the Wurundjeri-William people, who inhabited and managed the landscape for millennia and remain culturally connected. The fertile confluence of the Plenty River and the Yarra River/*Birrarung* and adjoining stringy-bark forests hosted squatters from 1837 and was soon after referred to as the 'Lower Plenty'. Much of this area had been alienated by the close of the decade and considered to be of better quality than land elsewhere in the Parish of Nillumbik.¹⁰

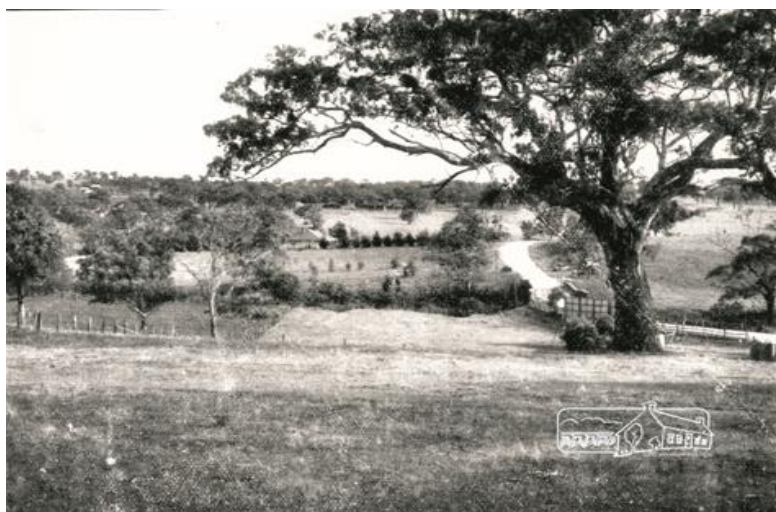
Sizable land parcels and absentee owners predominated over the 19th century, and the emergent locality was mainly cleared and cultivated or stocked by a small community of tenant farmers. The track linking Heidelberg and the Village of Eltham, which passed through the Lower Plenty, was proclaimed a road in 1840 (now Old Eltham Road), and the Plenty River bridged two years later.¹¹ The present-day Main Road (initially called Eltham Road) was laid in 1869.¹²

Subdivision in the Lower Plenty intensified during the 1920s, although the locale remained sparsely populated and a 'semi-suburban and rural area' into the 1950s.¹³ Reminiscing about the postwar years, the notable mudbrick builder Alistair Knox described cycling through the area with the émigré architect Frederick Romberg, describing the Lower Plenty as a 'wide undulating... savannah landscape' dotted with 'Primeval redgums of enormous size'.¹⁴

Residential development increased progressively from the 1960s, with the construction of 'prestige' houses on large-scale allotments predominating.¹⁵ Within this layer, a conspicuous minority displayed an organic/regional expression:

Twelve miles from Melbourne, the ... [Lower Plenty] is still largely covered with scrub gums and since the housing is nearly all contemporary, the natural appearance of the locality has not been obliterated. More often than not, the modern house has been built to blend, rather than stand apart from its surroundings.¹⁶

Open spaces and a general natural/rustic setting remain prevalent throughout Lower Plenty, with a peri-rural character predominating in its southern reaches. The Lower Plenty was administered by the District (later the Shire) of Eltham until 1994, after which municipal amalgamation led to its transfer (along with Montmorency) to the newly formed City of Banyule.



Photograph from a land sale brochure showing the rural landscape west from the old Lower Plenty Bridge, dated 1920s (Source: Eltham District Historical Society, *Victorian Collections*, 00180)

¹⁰ 'Nillumbik' may stem from the Indigenous word *nyilumbik*, meaning 'bad, stupid or red earth'. (Jill Barnard, 'Nillumbik Shire', *eMelbourne*, School of Historical & Philosophical Studies, The University of Melbourne, July 2008, available online; and Context, *Banyule Thematic Environmental History*, October 2018, pp15-20, available online)

¹¹ The Plenty River was named in 1835 by Joseph T Gellibrand, the first Attorney-General of Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) and a leading figure within the Port Phillip Association. Its designation as a river was more warranted before the formation of the Yan Yean Reservoir in the mid-19th century, which reduced its flow. Hoddle referred to it as the 'Yarra Rivulet'.

¹² The 1843 bridge was replaced in 1865 by the existing 'Old Lower Plenty Bridge' (HO106).

¹³ Alan Marshall, *Pioneers & Painters: One Hundred Years of Eltham and its Shire*, Thomas Nelson, 1971, p84

¹⁴ Alistair Knox, *We Are What We Stand On: a personal history of the Eltham Community*, Adobe Press, 1980, chapter 39

¹⁵ 'Lower Plenty', *Victorian Places*, 2014, available online; and Andrew Lemon, 'Lower Plenty', *eMelbourne*, The University of Melbourne, July 2008, available online; and Context, BTEH, p37

¹⁶ Rick Campbell, 'Suburban Living, but with hills and bush', *Age*, 9 November 1968, p23. See also, various slides by Peter Wille of organic/regional architecture in the area at the SLV.

Site-specific

The subject land derives from the roughly 384-hectare purchase (Portion 2, Parish of Nillumbik) made in 1840 by the Corkonian, Benjamin Baxter.¹⁷ He had arrived in Sydney Town in 1837 as a Captain in the 50th (Queen's Own) Regiment of Foot, charged with escorting a convict transport. Sensing opportunities in the embryonic Port Phillip District, Baxter acquired a Depasturing Licence, ran cattle at Emerald Hill and St Kilda, and held various civil appointments. Around the time Baxter procured his estate in what became the Lower Plenty and Montmorency, he also established a 6,000-hectare pastoral run known as *Carrup Carrup* at Baxter's Flat (Baxter), which became his permanent residence.¹⁸ In 1927, a large part of Portion 2 was acquired for use by the Heidelberg Golf Club.¹⁹

Suburban allotments on either side of Old Eltham Road were released and developed in a seeming ad hoc fashion from the early 20th-century. In November 1968, husband-and-wife Zoltan and Elizabeth Jane Okalyi became joint proprietors of the subject allotment.²⁰ Then a block covered in regrowth bush. Attached to the Certificate of Title was a covenant requiring that at least \$16,000 is expended for residential construction, at the time placing a new build within the middle-cost bracket.²¹ Both Okalyis were accomplished international-level fencers, and Zoltan studied medicine and later practised in the district as a psychiatrist.²²



October 1968 aerial photograph of the undeveloped subject allotment, indicated by the red arrow, (Source: Landata, Project no 1968, Run 15, Frame 192)

Contemporaneous with the Okalyi purchase, the *Age* published a feature article that highlighted the influence of the modern movement in the Lower Plenty:

On one stretch of the Old Eltham Road, just a few hundred yards from the Lower Plenty shopping centre, all but one or two of the houses are built around the concept of squat, angular geometry. There may be more or less glass. White surfaces may contrast with dark wood. But always roofs are flat and windows square and open...²³

¹⁷ Refer to *Plan of the Parish of Nillumbik*, Office of Lands and Survey, 1866, SLV, available online

¹⁸ 'Death of Captain Baxter: An Old Colonist and Pioneer', *Mornington Standard*, 19 May 1892, p3; and Marshall, *Pioneers & Painters*, pp82-4

¹⁹ *Heidelberg Golf Club*, 'History', available online

²⁰ Elizabeth was initially recorded as the sole proprietor in June 1968. (Certificate of Title, vol. 8722, folio 500)

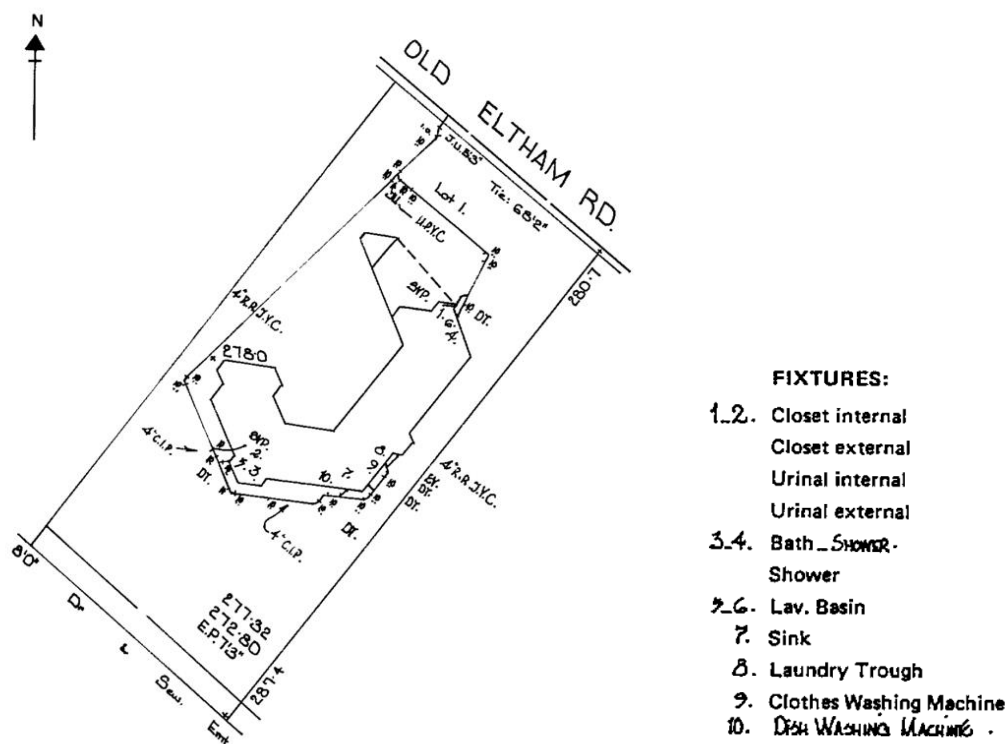
²¹ Certificate of Title, vol. 8722, folio 500. Details of this covenant are supplied by Rick Campbell, 'Suburban Living, but with hills and bush', *Age*, 9 November 1968, p23. Assessment of average construction costs deduced from various sources, for instance: Daryl Jackson, 'Houses off-the-hook', *Age*, 26 June 1967, p11

²² Born in Hungary, Zoltan represented Australia at the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome as a fencer. By at least the early 1980s, 'Liz' was being described as one of 'Australia's top women fencers'. (SR/Olympic Sports record, available online; *Age*, 30 June 1964, p1; and Peg McMahon, 'Our fencers are aiming high', *Age*, 30 December 1981, p15)

²³ Campbell, 'Suburban Living, but with hills and bush', p23

The well-established modernist architect Charles Duncan was engaged by the Okalyis to design their family home. The nature of their relationship is unknown; however, Duncan later commented that his most fruitful work stemmed from creative/positive with his clients, when both parties adopted the dogma 'every good building must have one idea'.²⁴ It appears that that *Okalyi House* was designed in 1968; Duncan may have commenced the process before the property was formally acquired. The residence had been constructed and occupied, at the latest, by 1970.²⁵ The contractors were K Soust Development Pty Ltd.²⁶

During or soon after completion, *Okalyi House* was photographed by the modernist enthusiast Peter Wille (1931-71), who recorded much of Duncan's domestic work in the period.²⁷ In early 1972, *Okalyi House* was awarded *The Age*/RAIA 'House of the Week Citation' (no 34) – then a recognized architectural prize with widespread reach.²⁸



Property Sewerage Plan, *Okalyi House*, 25 February 1976 – a reflection of the slow rollout of services in the area, rather than the construction date (Source: Yarra Valley Water)

The detailed article accompanying the citation, prepared by the then director of the Architects' Housing Service, John Barker, provides several insights into the design development of *Okalyi House*:

In an age of standardisation and modular planning, few designers depart from floor plans based on rectangular shapes. Generally this trend is promoted by the need for economy and speed of construction. An exception to the rule is provided in a 22 square house designed by architect Charles Duncan for a sloping site in Old Eltham Road.

The plan of the house was based on triangular shapes and constructed in solid brick with heavy timber beams. Mr. Duncan justifies this design approach, not in terms of economy but in utilisation of space. "Three co-ordinate planning is useful particularly in domestic work for creating a continuity of space and pockets of usable area not found in rectangular planning," say Mr. Duncan.

"Rooms which are small in area may be dimensionally larger than would otherwise be possible. A release from the rigidity of rectangular planning is exciting and entirely functional when properly resolved. In this case the planning principle was not pre-conceived but developed naturally from the most desirable positioning of rooms on the site."

²⁴ Andrew Briant, *Charles Duncan Architect*, University of Melbourne, November 1983, p9

²⁵ The design date (1968) is provided in a university essay by an author with firsthand knowledge of Duncan's practice (Briant, *Charles Duncan Architect*, p3). Zolton and Jane are first recorded at 66 Old Eltham Road, Lower Plenty in the 1970 edition of *Australia, Electoral Rolls*, Subdivision of Eltham (p103). However, Goad gives the construction date as 1968 (*The modern house in Melbourne*, Chapter 6, p53).

²⁶ John Barker, 'A new angle on planning', *Age*, 15 May 1972, p11

²⁷ Willie was employed as a draftsman by the firm Smith, Tracey, Lyon & Block. In his own time, he compiled an extensive record of modernist designs in Melbourne, predominantly in its southeast (he resided in Mount Waverly).

²⁸ Barker, 'A new angle on planning', p11

The site had a cross fall of about 6 feet to the north west. An excavated cut of three feet allowed the house to be set snugly into the contours using the external wall below the window sill to retain the soil. A continuous cavity ensured that dampness would not penetrate the house. The combination of a high ground line and deep projecting eaves achieves a sympathetic relationship between building and site. Surplus soil was used to form artificial mounds which exaggerate the natural features of the wooded terrain. Walking around the high side of the site one can reach out and touch the natural grey cement roof tiles which sweep down below eye level. The ridge of the roof is supported by a 16 inch deep laminated pine beam which is carried through to the carport as a continuous structural spine.

The timber lined ceiling follows the low pitch of the roof and floating timber panels above passage ways are used to conceal the indirect ceiling lighting. Areas are articulated internally by angular elements of exposed brickwork. For example, the large living area is simply defined by the two triangular forms of the pantry and open fire-place. The continuous flow of space requires few doors as visual privacy develops from the appropriate juxtaposition of areas.

From the living section the bedroom and carport wings extend to enclose a landscaped court which receives sun throughout the day. The slate paved court is surrounded by full glass walls and contains a bluestone barbeque with provision for a future swimming pool. The carport wing is planned for future extension to provide extra accommodation.

A simple colour scheme is derived from the use of natural materials throughout the house. Exposed orange-brown bricks and pine ceilings contrast with the neutral grey floor paved in reused roofing slates. Controlled use of orange Laminex adds a touch of colour to the bench tops. The house is heated by an oil fired system with ducts laid below the concrete floor.²⁹



'Heavy laminated beams supported on brick piers enclose the carport of Charles Duncan's design at Lower Eltham' (Source: Barker, "The Age" — RAlA Citation Award No. 34', *Age*, 15 May 1972, p11)

The article also noted that Gordon Craig Ford (1918-99) was responsible for the site's garden.³⁰ Ford, a local of Eltham, was then emerging as a well-regarded landscape designer in the vanguard of furthering and popularising 'bush style' gardens. He often collaborated with modernist architects, supporting many in their aim to integrate building and site.³¹

The Okalyi family occupied the subject place into at least the 1980s.³²

²⁹ Barker, 'A new angle on planning', p11

³⁰ Barker, 'A new angle on planning', p11

³¹ Gordon Ford with Gwen Ford, *Gordon Ford: The Natural Australian Garden*, 1999

³² Electoral rolls, Ancestry.com.au



1975 aerial photograph

The footprint of *Okalyi House*, obscured by foliage, is indicated by the red arrow

(Source: Landata, Project no 1243, 24A, Frame 147)

Charles Frederick Duncan (1933 –)

Over the 1960s and 1970s, Duncan was responsible for a large, chiefly domestic body of work throughout Victoria that expressed a 'highly original' and personalised interpretation of the Wrightian tradition.³³ His organic design approach represented a different strain of the postwar modern movement in Australia. One more responsive of the landscape and decisive in eliciting a poetic/evocative effect. During the 1960s and 1970s, Duncan was widely recognised as one of the neo-Wrightian idiom's more talented and successful practitioners in the state. Yet despite multiple awards, a relatively prolific output for a small practice, and published acclaim – the *Age* referred to him as 'one of the best-known architects in Victoria' in 1970 – Duncan has yet to receive sustained scholarly attention.³⁴

Between 1951 and 1959, Duncan was enrolled in the Diploma of Architecture course at the Royal Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT). He finished his architectural studies at the University of Melbourne, a member of a postwar generation of architects moulded by a rebooted curriculum, provocative tutors, the zeal of 'multiplying modernisms' and a dynamic broader context.³⁵ Both during and after his studies, Duncan worked for a range of leading architectural offices, namely Chancellor & Patrick, Peter Jorgensen, McGlashan Everist, and Hassell and McConnell.³⁶ Many of these firms and practitioners were themselves exploring Wrightian/organic/regionalist design modes, which resonated through much of Duncan's subsequent practice. In his own words:

My feelings are strongly orientated to the organic approach where a house is closely linked to its surroundings and extends from them as part of it not on it.³⁷

In 1962, the 29-year-old Duncan commenced his solo architectural career. His first commission – the *Williams House* in the Griffins-designed Glenard Estate (Eaglemont) – received the prestigious RAIA Victoria Architecture Medal (single house category) in 1965. The often-acerbic magazine, *Cross-Section*, described it as:

One of the few houses by Melb. Archts, young or old, that seems to have deep-seated convictions about architecture as a lively and vigorous art — you can tell the year an architect graduated by his response to this house.³⁸

³³ Goad, *The modern house in Melbourne, 1945-1975*, Chapter 6, p30.

³⁴ Ray Davie, 'It's a grand winner' *Age*, 7 February 1970, p25

³⁵ Geoffrey Serle, *Robin Boyd: A Life*, Melbourne University Press, 1996, p104

³⁶ Built Heritage, *Survey of Post-War Built Heritage in Victoria. Stage Two: Assessment of Community & Administrative Facilities*, Heritage Victoria, 31 May 2010, p133; and Winsome Callister, 'Duncan, Charles', in Philip Goad and Julie Willis, eds, *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p216

³⁷ *Merchant Builders: Towards a new archive*, Melbourne School of Design, 2015, p19

³⁸ *Cross-Section*, The University of Melbourne Department of Architecture, issue no 142, 1 August 1964

The first two decades of Duncan's solo practice were particularly productive, with at least seven high-end designs constructed in Banyule, mostly across its peri-urban, bushland fringes – optimal settings for Duncan's characteristic organic/regional approach. Outside the municipality, *Tozer House* in Beaconsfield (1964), a 'pinwheel' plan 'recalling a de Stijl painting' constructed of recycled materials (brick, timber, slate), drew popular/critical attention.³⁹ The *Eltham South Kindergarten* (HO202/Nillumbik Shire), built in 1970, was rare departure from his mostly residential work. Duncan continued operations as an architect into the 1990s.

Thematic Context

Context, *Banyule Thematic Environmental History*, October 2018:

- Theme 5: Suburban development

See also Allom Lovell & Associates, *Banyule Heritage Place Study: An Urban History*, vol 1, July 1999:

- 6.4 Post-War Residential Development

Comparative Analysis

One Duncan-designed residence in Banyule is currently affected by a HO:

- *Williams House*, 4 Glenard Drive, Eaglemont (HO146) – an 'aggressive play of clinker brick walls and hefty roof planes edged by deep-facias of stained timber', built in 1963.⁴⁰ It was later the recipient of the RAlA Victoria Architecture Medal (1965) and consists of a series of overlapping volumes with stepped flat roofs and extensive window walls. It is more representative of Duncan's formative organic designs, compared to the more ambitious formwork of *Okalyi House*.

There are also some instances of Duncan's residential work within the Elliston Estate (HO92) in Rosanna – a residential development by the innovative company Merchant Builders, initiated in 1969. Four notable architectural architects/practices were engaged (Charles Duncan, Daryl Jackson and Evan Walker, David McGlashan and Neil Everist, and Graeme Gunn) to prepare multiple designs with Ellis Stone responsible for integrating the subdivision with a contrived bushland landscape. Several houses by these architects were constructed in the southern section of the estate (Bachli Court to Von Ninda Crescent). These houses are generally modestly scaled and nestled in Stone's landscaping with a palette of brown or tan brick, flat or skillion roofs, and stained finish to the timberwork (facias, windows, etc.). In 1971 Merchant Builders sold the remaining parts of the estate for speculative development.

Several Duncan-designed houses have also been identified in Banyule as part of this Study.⁴¹ Of those known, all date from the 1960s or 1970s – his most architecturally productive period – and are representative of his particular approach. However, these vary in their intactness and/or level of distinctiveness.

An array of architect-designed modernist houses are included in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay for Banyule. Most originate in the 1950s and reflect the multiplying version of mid-century modernism. The dominant influence of the International Style is prevalent, particularly its preference for rectangular footprints, cuboid forms and stripped-down aesthetic; for instance, 10 Alexandra Street, Greensborough (HO136) by Moore and Hammond, 1957. Others reveal the period's growing interest in the modular derivation of the plan, with steel or timber framing and lightweight panelling and bands of glazing. A key example of specific geometry is the 1954 *Snelleman House* (HO36 + VHR H2282) in Ivanhoe East by architects Peter and Dione McIntyre, often referred to as the 'Coil House'. While the neo-Wrightian organic undertones of *Okalyi House* are faintly detectable in some of these designs, only one is especially reflective:

- *V Walker House*, 209 Main Road, Lower Plenty (HO163) – a two-storey cream-brick residence with an unusual, some organic trapezoidal form created by slanted sidewalls and a 'folded' gabled roof, by Hipwell, Weight & Mason, 1958.

Okalyi House stands apart from other instances of postwar or late 20th-century modernism for its atypical modular form and potent ability to epitomise a mature rendition of 1960s organic/regional design philosophy.

³⁹ *Tozer House/Kenilworth*, 6 Coach House Lane, Beaconsfield (part of HO53/Cardinia Shire Council) – see Geoffrey, Philip and Hamann, *An Unfinished Experiment in Living: Australian Houses 1950-65*, p358

⁴⁰ *Cross-Section*, The University of Melbourne Department of Architecture, issue no 142, 1 August 1964, np

⁴¹ Existing Duncan designs in the municipality include *Reade House*, 14 Lorraine Drive, Briar Hill (1966); *Woollogorang/Bucknell House*, 8 Woodfull Road, Lower Plenty (1967); 56 Buckingham Drive, Banyule; *Knott House*, 21 Castle Street, Eaglemont (1968-9); and *Wynkara*, 17 Stawell Road, Lower Plenty (undated). The Duncan-designed *Host House* at 27 Seymour Road, Viewbank, has recently been demolished/replaced.

Collectively, these varied examples of modernism provide insight into the forces of modernity that shaped the district following the Second World War, particularly shifting sociocultural and economic factors and the willingness of some residents to interact with then unconventional design culture and novel lifestyle patterns.⁴²

Intactness

Largely intact

Previous Assessment

- Heritage Alliance, *Survey of Post-War Built Heritage in Victoria*, Stage 1, vol 2, October 2008, p183 (part F)
- RBA Architects + Conservation Consultants, *Banyule Heritage Study 2020: Stage 1 report*, Banyule City Council, August 2020 – High priority, recommend for Stage 2

Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls

External Paint Controls	Yes (brick walls and timber elements)
Internal Alteration Controls	Yes (pine ceilings, brick fireplace, exposed brick walls, slate floors)
Tree Controls	Yes (front garden – mature native/indigenous species)
Outbuildings and/or fences	No

Extent of Heritage Overlay

The proposed extent of the heritage overlay is outlined approximately below.



Recommended extent of heritage overlay.
(Source: Nearmap, April 2020)

⁴² Geoffrey London, Philip Goad and Conrad Hamann, *An Unfinished Experiment in Living: Australian Houses 1950-65*, UWA Publishing, 2017, passim